# THE NORTH CAROLINA HISTORICAL REVIEW

VOLUME VI APRIL, 1929 NUMBER 2

## THE PRESERVATION OF TENNESSEE HISTORY[1]

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The history of the region that now is the state of Tennessee, in so far as white men and not the aborigines alone are concerned, begins possibly with the expedition of Hernando De Soto in 1540-1541. More probably white men first set foot on the soil of the future Tennessee when James Needham and Gabriel Arthur from Virginia in 1673 visited the Cherokee Indians or when in that same year Marquette and Jolliet made their memorable voyage down the Mississippi. Certainly in the years that followed came traders, soldiers and hunters, and finally in 1768 or 1769 the first permanent white settlers. Government was first organized when in 1772 the Watauga Compact was adopted by the few pioneers in what is now the upper eastern corner of the State. Then followed recognition of North Carolina's authority and the future Tennessee became Washington County and in time several counties of that State. A repudiation of North Carolina's authority a few years later by three of those counties under the name of the state of Franklin failed. Finally, in 1790 the Tennessee region became the Territory of the United States South of the River Ohio (better known as the Southwest Territory). Six years later came statehood.

It is not with the records of the Tennessee region in this early period that this article is primarily concerned. Responsibility for the preservation of many of those records rested in the first instance with authorities outside the boundaries of the present Ten-

[1] The material for this paper, in addition to that cited in foot notes, has been secured from legislative acts and journals, from interviews and letters, and from personal examination or use of the repositories of documents herein described.

nessee, and little attempt has been made to bring into the State copies of such as may now be found elsewhere.[2]

Of the local records of this period the Watauga Compact and the papers of the government established under it seem to have been destroyed. Of the early county governments some records have fortunately been preserved. Of the records of the state of Franklin few are in Tennessee, and the same must be said, except for county records, of the government of the territory. The student of the pre-statehood period of Tennessee history must go, accordingly, to widely separated places of the earth for the documents so necessary for his work. In the South Carolina archives he will find "Indian Books" and legislative and executive journals that record the activities of traders and soldiers who ventured into the wilderness that was to be Tennessee. In North Carolina's archives are documents of the utmost value for the history of North Carolina's once western counties and the men who lived in them.[3] In the Library of Congress are important documents in the Papers of the Continental Congress, in transcripts from foreign archives, and in other groups of manuscripts. In the archives of the Department of State in Washington are records of the territorial government. In the library of the State Historical Society of Wisconsin are the well known Draper Collections. In the Public Record Office in London are records made by British officials in America. In the archives of France and Spain are documents that date from the years when the governments of these countries received reports about the Tennessee country from officials in New Orleans, Mobile, and Pensacola.

As regards the period of statehood only passing mention need be made of the fact that valuable records are to be found in a number of places outside the State. Notable, for example, are the papers of Andrew Jackson, James K. Polk, and Andrew Johnson in the Library of Congress. For years before the libraries of Tennessee awoke to the desirability of building up collections of Tennesseeans, libraries of other states collected Tennessee pamphlets, newspapers, and manuscripts.

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[2] This is a general statement to which in detail some exceptions can be taken. See *post* for an account of the McClung Collection.

[3] A great part, probably the major part, of these have been printed in the *Colonial and State Records of North Carolina* (30 vols., Raleigh, 1886-1914.)

## THE STATE ARCHIVES

The archives of Tennessee, like the archives of other states, suffered greatly from destructive forces before attempts were made to secure systematic preservation of them, yet much of historical value remains. One factor making for loss or destruction of official records was the failure of the State during its early years to adopt a permanent capital. First Knoxville, then Kingston, Knoxville again, Nashville, Knoxville, Murfreesborough until 1826, and then finally Nashville were the seats of government. Not until 1853 was the present capitol building occupied. The Civil War, during which Tennessee was a major battle area, caused other losses. Carelessness, ignorance, and indifference played their part. Few were interested in the history of the State. Few realized that the records of the state government in all its branches were records of that history. Few knew or cared whether or not these records were carefully preserved.

By the constitution of 1796 and by act of the legislature of that year it was required of the Secretary of State that he keep a record of all the official acts and proceedings of the governor and of the legislature. It appears also that without specific legislative warrant the office of the Secretary of State became the depository for records of other agencies of government that were deemed by him or by other officials worthy of preservation. Thus the Secretary of State became in a limited sense the State's first archivist.

As early as 1837 the rooms of this official were over-crowded and were characterised by the governor as "by no means suitable for the preservation of the official documents, books, and papers of the state." The completion of the new capitol building in 1853 probably relieved congestion for some years, but in time this building was outgrown. In the years after the Civil War as space in the offices in the capitol building came increasingly into demand many of the records of these offices were removed into one out-of-the-way place and then another until ultimately great quantities of them were dumped into the west crypt of the basement of the capitol. Here they remained for years neglected. They "lay piled in masses on the stone floors, among old paint barrels, ashes, trash of every description, dirt and grime. They were wet and rotting, and it was during this period that the janitor of the capitol burned up several cartloads because of the fact that they were 'wet and

nasty and smelled bad.'" Quantities were sold, without legislative authorization, as waste paper. On one occasion three thousand volumes of records of the state bank and its branches were sold to a junk dealer. Other documents were mutilated by persons who sought stamps and autographs. One seeker after knowlege of Tennessee history accidentally found "the original manuscript draft of the constitution of 1796, with the autograph signatures of all the members of the convention which framed it—covered with dust in the back of a pigeon-hole in an unused closet, where it had doubtless lain undisturbed for thirty or forty years."[4]

It was not until early in the present century that some steps were taken at least to preserve the State's archives that had thus far escaped destruction. The legislature of 1901 ordered an investigation of the condition of archives in the basement and provision was made for the construction of a room in the attic of the capitol in which the archives could be stored. Governor Benton McMillin ordered the archives removed from the basement to the armory and then to the room provided in the attic. Out of a small surplus of funds appropriated for the expenses of the governor's office he employed Mr. Robert T. Quarles to bring some order out of the chaos of documents in the attic. Mr. Quarles who had been for some time connected with the State Library and was an enthusiastic advocate of a careful preservation of the State's archives thus became Tennessee's first archivest, yet it is interesting to note that neither by law nor by resolution did the legislature ever establish that office.[5] Nevertheless, the legislature of 1903 appropriated $1,200 for the biennium to be spent under the direction of the governor for the preservation of the archives. In 1905 the Tennessee Historical Society attempted to secure from the legislature the organization of a Department of Archives. This the legislature refused to do, but it did include in the General Appropriation Bill $1,000 per year for the salary and expenses of a secretary of the "Department of History and Archives." In 1907 this was increased to $1,750, two years later to $2,000, and the addition of a clerk at $500 per year in 1911 brought the total to $2,500. With these meagre appropriations Mr. Quarles labored, until his death in 1913,

[4] Information and quotations in this paragraph are taken largely from R. A. Halley, "The Preservation of Tennessee History," in *American Historical Magazine*, VIII, 49-63.

[5] This is pointed out in A. P. Foster, "Tennessee Department of Library, Archives and History," in *Tennessee Historical Magazine*, VI, 266-278. No department of archives was established, except to the extent that appropriations were made for it.

to arrange and classify the documents in his care and to add to the archives documents that had not previously been transferred.

Upon the death of Mr. Quarles, his son, Robert T. Quarles, Jr., succeeded him for a few months, and he in turn gave way to Dr. Gus W. Dyer. In 1915 Dr. Dyer refused the request of the governor that he resign, whereupon the legislature by resolution declared that the Department of History and Archives upon the expiration of the appropriation act of 1913 had "no legal existence under any law." It thus got rid of Dr. Dyer, and appropriated for the "Department of Archives and History" only $900 per annum for a clerk's salary and $1,000 for office expenses. Two years later the total appropriation was decreased by $100. In 1919 the department that never had been recognized in law except in appropriation acts was abolished; its books and papers were ordered transferred to the custody of the State Library; and to the library appropriation was added $500 per annum for archive expenses and $720 for an extra porter "to look after said books and papers."

By the same legislature that abolished the Department of History and Archives the Tennessee State Historical Committee was authorized. Apparently the World War was partly responsible for this, because the joint resolution that empowered the governor to appoint the twenty five members of this committee charged it with the duty of collecting, arranging, and indexing data "of every kind and character relating to the part that Tennessee has played in the great world war." A later joint resolution of this same legislative session (1919) took a broader view of the whole period of the State's history, declared truly that Tennessee's history had not been written because of a "lack of collected material on which to base such history," and directed the Historical Committee to collect, compile, index, and arrange data on Tennessee's part in all the wars to which she had been a party and materials of all kinds relating to the development of the State, the life of its people, the careers of its distinguished personalities, etc. These materials were to be turned over to the State Librarian for safe keeping. The committee was duly appointed with Mr. John Trotwood Moore, who was also State Librarian, as chairman. Unfortunately, however, the legislature made no appropriation with which to aid the committee in the performance of its duties and not much could accordingly be done.

The legislature of 1921 took a decidedly forward step when it pased an act broadening the duties of the Historical Committee and providing financial support for it. By this act the Historical Committee was given the duty of collecting for permanent preservation in the archives "the individual records of the Tennessee Soldiers, Sailors, Airmen and Marines who saw service in the great World War . . . together with all the original letters, maps, papers, official documents, medals, mementoes and souvenirs possible to be collected and all other papers which will throw Historical light on the valiant part enacted by Tennessee in the World War." The committee should collect also "the records of the State's World War activities, both civil, and military" as performed by organizations and by individuals. It was furthermore provided that the committee should "collect from the files of old newspapers, court records, church records, private collections and elsewhere, historical data, pertaining to the State of Tennessee and the territory included therein from the earliest time; to have such material properly edited, published by the state printer and distributed under the direction of the Committee; to care for the proper marking and perservation of Battlefields, houses and other places celebrated in the history of the State; to provide and maintain a Historical Museum; to diffuse knowledge in reference to the History and resources of Tennessee; to encourage the study of Tennessee history in the schools of the State, and to stimulate and encourage historical investigation and [*sic*] records among the people of the State." Another provision of the act authorized "any State, County, Town or other public officials, in custody of public documents" to turn over to the committee for permanent preservation such of these documents as were not in current use. Finally the committee was allowed an annual appropriation of $10,000 with which to employ a secretary and perform the duties imposed upon it.

The chairman of the committee sought energetically to stimulate interest in its work. County committees, advisory to the state committee, were organized. Appeals were made through the newspapers. Questionnaires were sent to old soldiers and to others. Attempts were made particularly to get the records of military activities. Something was achieved. Some diaries, letters, curios, etc., were sent to the committee. About 4,500 Confederate veterans replied to questionnaires giving information or person-

al and family history, impressions of negro slavery, and social and educational conditions under which they had lived. Some six hundred Federal soldiers did the same, as did a number of pioneer citizens upwards of eighty years of age. A systematic attempt was made to secure complete records of Tennessee's "Gold Star Boys" of the World War. Many historic spots were marked.[6]

The Tennessee Historical Committee was short-lived. Governor Austin Peay's Administrative Reorganization Bill in 1923 created within the Department of Education a Division of Library and Archives and transferred to this division the powers and duties formerly vested in the State Librarian and the Tennessee Historical Committee. The appropriation bill of this year granted only $5,000 per year for "History and Archives work." This appropriation was discontinued two years later but in 1927 it was restored and $2,400 per year was added for the salary of a "Keeper of Archives and Museum." This does not include the appropriation for the salary of the "Supervisor" of the division, Mr. Moore, whose title by this act is stated to be "State Librarian and Historian."[7]

Meanwhile the archives were at last brought from the attic of the capitol where they were in some danger from fire and from leaks in the roof and where despite the labors of Mr. Quarles and his successors they were still not conveniently arranged for those who desired to use them. The persevering student, following a janitor who carried the archives key up a long, narrow, and steep flight of stone steps, might gain access to the room. Here no one was in permanent charge to guide him in his search for information. The place was poorly lighted, dusty, unheated in winter, hot under the roof in summer. For years the Tennessee Historical Society and interested persons had asked in vain for an archives building. In 1919 the attention of the House of Representatives was somewhat forcefully called to the archives when a resolution was passed directing an immediate investigation to determine whether or not the excessive weight of the archives in the attic above the House of Representatives was calculated to overload and crush the floor and thus endanger the lives of members of the House. It was in this same year that the construction of an impressive War Memorial Building was authorized by the legislature. Provision was made for the location of the archives in this fire proof building and upon its comple-

[6] *Reports of Tennessee Historical Commission [sic] covering biennium* 1921-1923.
[7] His letterhead, however, entitles him, "Librarian and Archivist."

tion in 1925 a large part, though not all, of the archival records of the State were removed from the capitol attic to their new and much more adequate home.[8]

Such of the archives as have been moved to the Memorial Building are safe from fire and water and other agencies of destruction, and they are far more conveniently located and arranged for the use of those who desire to use them than formerly they were. No complete list of them has been prepared and printed,[9] and only careful search can reveal in detail what is or is not to be found. A cursory examination reveals materials of great historical value as well as serious gaps in important files of documentary records.

Some of the most important materials, without considering gaps therein, may be briefly mentioned.[10] Journals of Tennessee's three constitutional conventions have been printed but a journal of the important Committee of the Whole of the Convention of 1834 has not. Journals and acts of the legislature, including the acts and ordinances of the territorial period, are almost complete. Other legislative records, bills, resolutions, petitions, reports of committees, are numerous. Papers and letters of the governors date from 1796. Papers from the offices of the comptroller and the treasurer are voluminous. Materials for the study of banks, turnpikes, railroads, schools, and state institutions exist in considerable quantities. Many military and pension records have been preserved and recently photostats of muster rolls in Washington have been secured. Records of Tenesseeans who died in the World War have been compiled. Replies to questionnaires sent to Confederate and Union soldiers and to pioneer settlers have been filed. Several hundred volumes of land grants dating from 1784 and other papers relating to lands have been preserved, as have great quantities of records of the superior courts. In addition to formal records of the state government a considerable body of family papers, reminiscences, etc., have been from time to time given to the State.

Many of the more recent records of the various departments of

[8] This should be thought of as an archives building. The archives and the Tennessee Historical Society occupy only a portion of it. The State Library remains in the capitol building.

[9] In the absence of such a list and complete calendars, the most useful guides to the Tennessee Archives are St. George L. Sioussat, "A Preliminary Report upon the Archives of Tennessee," in *Annual Report of the American Historical Association*, 1906, II, 197-238, and Silas Erwin Scates, A Classification of Some Historical Material in Nashville, Tennessee (a Master of Arts thesis in George Peabody College for Teachers, 1926).

[10] No attempt is made here to distinguish between the records that have been removed to the War Memorial Building and those that have not yet been removed.

government have not, of course, been transferred to the archives. County officials have not availed themselves of the permission granted in the Historical Committee Act of 1921 to transfer their records to a central repository of archives.

## MONUMENTS AND MEMORIALS

The Tennessee legislature in recent years has been generous in its appropriations for the erection of monuments and the preservation of places of historic interest. Over a long period of time it has granted money to the Ladies' Hermitage Association for the preservation and repair of the Hermitage, the home of Andrew Jackson. In 1921 it provided for the purchase and improvement of the Andrew Johnson Tailor Shop in Greeneville and has subsequently assisted in its maintenance. In 1925 it appropriated $8,500 for a statue of Andrew Jackson for Statuary Hall in the national capitol in Washington. The legislature of 1927 appropriated $5,000 for the establishment and maintenance of the Tennessee room in the Confederate Museum in Richmond, $2,500 for a monument at Jonesborough in honor of John Sevier and the state of Franklin, and $25,000 to purchase, repair and preserve the house of Sam Davis in Rutherford County. At other times monuments to various notables of the State have been provided for. In 1925 a Monument Commission was established with an appropriation in that year of $51,000 and in 1927 of the same amount for the purchase of the James K. Polk home and the erection of memorials to General Nathan Bedford Forrest, Governor Robert L. Taylor, and such other memorials and monuments as the commission should approve. From this fund aid has been given to the Governor William Blount Mansion Association for the purchase of the home in Knoxville of Tennessee's territorial governor.

## LIBRARIES

A number of libraries in Tennessee are making some attempt to collect records of the State's history, but most of them are handicapped by high prices and inadequate funds. The State Library, established in 1854, is housed in the capitol building, and of recent years it has added considerably to its collection of printed records of Tennessee. It has the most complete collection in the State of printed acts, journals, departmental reports, and miscellaneous pamph-

lets and periodicals. Its collection of newspapers is valuable, and it appears to be the only library in the State that is keeping up to date files of the leading papers of Nashville, Memphis, Knoxville, and Chattanooga. It has a large collection of oil portraits of Tennessee's governors and other notables.

In Knoxville the Lawson McGhee Library has an important collection of Tennesseeana. The neucleus for this was the private library of Mr. Calvin M. McClung who had for years been interested in genealogy and the early history of the region of eastern Tennessee. Following his death in 1919 this was given to the library by his widow who has since that time contributed substantially to its enlargement. Maintained in the library as a separate unit, known as the Calvin M. McClung Collection, it includes rare books, periodicals, pamphlets, Knoxville newspapers, maps, and manuscripts. Among the latter, special mention should be made of the T. A. R. Nelson papers, the Houk papers, some William Blount papers, photostats and transcripts of documents in the Library of Congress, in the South Carolina archives, and in the Spanish archives, and photostats of the Tennessee Papers and selected items of other groups from the Draper Collections of the State Historical Society of Wisconsin. The McClung Collection is particularly valuable for that early period of Tennessee History on which the state archives naturally have little.[11]

The Carnegie Library in Nashville has an important collection of Nashville newspapers and a working collection of books and pamphlets. The library of George Peabody College for Teachers in Nashville has a small group of Nashville newspapers and the valuable correspondence of James Robertson. The Cossitt Library in Memphis has a file of Memphis newspapers dating from 1834. The University of Tennessee Library in Knoxville has a small collection of newspapers and manuscripts.

## HISTORICAL SOCIETIES

The first organization of Tennesseeans interested in the preservation of the history of their State seems to have been the Tennessee Antiquarian Society in 1820. With Judge John Haywood as its president its existence was brief and it served chiefly the useful pur-

[11] George F. Mellen, "Calvin Morgan McClung and his Library," in *Tennessee Historical Magazine*, VII, 3-26; and catalogue entitled *Calvin Morgan McClung Historical Collection* (Knoxville, 1921). Since the printing of this catalogue of one hundred ninety-two pages many important additions have been made to the collection.

pose of assisting its president in the collection of materials for his *Natural and Aboriginal History of Tennessee* (1823) and his *Civil and Political History of the State of Tennessee* (1823). In the thirties another Tennessee historian, James G. M. Ramsey, was instrumental in the organization in Knoxville of the East Tennessee Historical and Antiquarian Society. Ramsey was its "Perpetual Corresponding Secretary,"[12] and it seems to have been of assistance to him in gathering material for his *Annals of Tennessee* (1853).

The Tennessee Historical Society, however, is the organization that has done most for the preservation of Tennessee history. It was organized in Nashville in 1849 "for the collection and preservation of the facts relative to the natural, aboriginal and civil history of the state of Tennessee." Its first president was Nathaniel Cross. During the early fifties it languished, but was revived in 1857 under the presidency of Col. A. W. Putnam, author of the *History of Middle Tennessee* (1859). Considerable progress was made by the society in the collection of manuscripts and the development of an historical museum until the Civil War compelled a suspension of its activities. In 1874 it was reorganized and in the following year it was incorporated. From 1857 until 1886 its collections were located in the State Library but crowded conditions there compelled it to seek new quarters which it found in the Watkins Institute Building.[13] In the course of time these accommodations became inadequate; there was danger of fire; and the most valuable of the society's manuscripts had to be removed to less accessible quarters in a fire-proof safe. For years the society sought to secure from the legislature some recognition of the valuable work it had done in collecting and preserving records of the State's history. It offered to give to the State its collections if the State would provide a suitable place for their preservation and safekeeping. Not until 1927, after the completion of the War Memorial Building, was this offer accepted. The legislature of that year by resolution accepted the proposal of the society to "turn over to the State in trust for permanent preservation and historical research and education, its collection of relics, books, newspapers, portraits, and manuscripts." This property, the legislative resolution continued, should be preserved under the direction of the Division of Library and Archives, but the

[12] J. G. M. Ramsey, Autobiography (MS.).
[13] John M. Lea, "History of the Tennessee Historical Society," in *American Historical Magazine*, VI, 352-362.

society should continue its corporate existence, and should continue to have for its use the rooms that had recently been assigned it in the Memorial Building where its collection should be maintained intact unless otherwise agreed to by mutual consent. Furthermore the legislature agreed that the state of Tennessee should make reasonable appropriations for proper equipment, for the care of the collection, for indexing it, for further collection of materials, and to aid in the publication of the society's magazine. The legislature of 1927 failed to make an appropriation for these purposes, but it is hoped by the society and its friends that the legislature of 1929 will give it the financial support that it greatly needs.

The society's collection has been housed since 1925 in these rooms in the Memorial Building. It has a card catalog of its manuscripts which include in considerable numbers letters of William Blount, John Coffee, Andrew Jackson, Joseph McMinn, John Overton, John Sevier, James Winchester, and others. It has a valuable file of newspapers, including the first issues (1791-1795) of Tennessee's first newspaper, *The Knoxville Gazette*. It has a large number of portraits of men prominent in Tennessee history and an interesting collection of historical relics.

A newcomer among historical organizations is the East Tennessee Historical Society, established in 1924, with headquarters in the McClung Collection in Knoxville. The Memphis Historical Society is also active. Some of the patriotic organizations of the State interest themselves in marking historic spots and preserving places of historic interest.

## PUBLICATIONS

In the publication of its historical records Tennessee and Tennesseeans have done relatively little. The Division of Library and Archives has printed, as yet, practically nothing. In 1896 Peabody Normal College began the quarterly publication under the editorship of Professor W. R. Garrett of the *American Historical Magazine*. In 1902, however, Peabody discontinued its support, but under the editorial direction of Mr. A. V. Goodpasture it was continued by the Tennessee Historical Society until 1904. Despite its name it was devoted largely to Tennessee history and its nine volumes contain the correspondence of James Robertson, the early records of Washington County, of Davidson County, and of the Cumberland Association, letters of Joseph McMinn, and of Andrew Jackson, and

William Blount's journal as territorial governor. In 1915 as the result of a bequest of $10,000 by General Gates P. Thruston, the Tennessee Historical Society began the publication of the *Tennessee Historical Magazine* with Professor St. George L. Sioussat for three years its editor. In it have been printed important documents, among them the diary of John Sevier, letters of William B. Campbell, Cave Johnson, James K. Polk, etc. Though nominally a quarterly, it has appeared only occasionally since 1918, largely, it appears because of inadequate finances. It has recently completed its nineth volume. The East Tennessee Historical Society has now in press the first volume of a series of *Publications* that it hopes to be able to issue at least annually.[14]

The records of Tennessee's history have in the past been criminally neglected. Something is now being done to preserve those public records that have not been lost or destroyed. Much needs yet to be done to collect newspapers, pamphlets, and manuscripts that have not been deposited in places of safe keeping and to make them accessible to students through calendaring, indexing, and publishing.

[14] Mention should be made of the fact that Haywood, Ramsey, and Putnam printed documents in their volumes and some of these documents are no longer in existence. A recent volume of documents has been edited by Judge Samuel C. Williams, *Early Travels in the Tennessee Country* 1540-1800 (Johnson City, 1928).